



Trans-Lake Washington Project

Washington State
Department of Transportation
Sound Transit

**Public Input For Weeks of
January 13, to
February 2, 2001**

Date of Comment: January 10, 2001

Subjects: Alternatives, impacts, mitigations/enhancements, HCT, and tunneling.

Comment:

As you know, last June the Cascadia Project at Discovery hosted a 520 forum that featured a presentation on underwater transportation tunnels, in particular, the design techniques of the Sweden Denmark Oresund Bridge/Tunnel Project. Also featured were toll financing and technologies on the Ontario Highway 407 project. As you consider options for the 520 corridor, we request that you consider several points made at that forum.

Specifically:

- Advances in tube and tunneling construction and design have made projects more affordable, particularly if they **combine** separate highway and transit (bus/rail) tubes, which helps leverage funding and enhances safety.
- Tunneling provides the most complete neighborhood and environmental mitigation in terms of salmon recovery, noise pollution and surface water runoff.
- While tunnels may be more expensive in initial construction than bridges, they can have a longer life expectancy (50-100 years) and can have lower maintenance costs than bridges.
- There are alternative ramp designs that can ensure connections to I-5 and I-405.
- Advanced geotechnical work on the Lake Washington shore bottom is necessary to investigate engineering and environmental issues.
- "High Occupancy Toll" lanes running parallel to "free" general purpose lanes can provide people with a choice between time and money. They may be a good option for 520 if they are also used in other highway expansion initiatives such as on I-405, I-5, SR 99/Alaska Way Viaduct, etc.
- The "520 corridor" extends beyond the intersection of I-5 in Seattle and should be coordinated with high capacity transit access to the Seattle Center, thus resolving the "Mercer Mess", as well as being coordinated with any future Alaska Way and I-5 improvements. The coordinated Trans-Lake Committee and I-405 study initiative is a good example.
- Finally, several forum attendees suggested that a visit to the Scandinavian region to view first hand the construction and financing techniques employed in tunnel and bridge development would be helpful. Norway, for instance, has also pioneered "submerged suspended tunnels" to cross deep fjords. It should be noted that the Greater Seattle Chamber plans to visit Stockholm, Sweden later this spring. Discovery Institute would be happy to explore the feasibility of sending a Puget Sound delegation along to visit these projects.

Date of Comment: January 9, 2001

Subjects: Alternatives, HOV lane, general-purpose lane, bicycle/pedestrian lane, and transit.

Comment:

Dear Trans-Lake Executive Committee:

We are pleased to hear that the Trans-Lake Project is moving much more rapidly than was originally predicted. However, we are very concerned about the list of alternatives that the Executive Committee selected to be included in the second-level screening process. Specifically, we are concerned that while the option of adding one HOV lane in each direction was included in the list of alternatives, a proposal to include one general-purpose lane in each direction was narrowly defeated. The fact that careful evaluation of the merits of each of these is not being included for comparative purposes is of great concern to us. Without each of these components being included for further evaluation, we doubt it can be determined which is the more cost-effective or efficient way to move people and goods throughout the region.

We do understand that one multi-modal alternative being reviewed includes a general-purpose lane and an HOV lane in each direction, and we support this option being included for evaluation. However, because the list of suggested alternatives appears to ignore general-purpose capacity improvement as a stand-alone alternative for study, we fear that once a final alternative is selected the result will be based on poor research and will therefore be less likely to receive public support.

For a number of years, our organizations have been advocating for long-term comprehensive solutions to our transportation problems. Similarly, we feel that in order to ensure public support, revenues must be spent on those projects that are most cost-effective and meet the greatest need. Although the current list may include the alternative that is ultimately selected, we will have difficulty building public support for the final project if it is not readily apparent that all viable alternatives have been carefully considered and evaluated on their merits.

This region is moving in the direction of multi-modal solutions, which by definition include general-purpose capacity. This fact is often ignored and we strongly feel that project decisions need to be made from a regional and/or corridor perspective without assuming that one size fits all. We must be committed to solving our problems in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. In some cases, this will call for increased general-purpose capacity, and in others it will mean other modes, such as transit, HOV, vanpool, rail, bicycles or any number of other options. However, such an analysis cannot be made from the list of alternatives that are currently included for second-level screening.

We respectfully request that the Executive Committee members revisit the list of alternatives to be included in the Trans-Lake EIS. Furthermore, we hope the committee will add alternatives that include creation of one and/or two general-purpose capacity lanes in each direction. If this is not done, we doubt the public will support funding the final proposed solution.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Date of Comment: January 8, 2001

Subjects: Impacts, mitigations/enhancements, HCT, transit, I-90, project, and EIS

Comment: To Sound Transit and the City of Seattle:

The Seattle Community Council Federation has long and emphatically supported transit as the highest priority for use of the I-90 Bridge. For this reason, the Federation is concerned that the Sound Transit Regional Express Mercer Island Project is considering an alternative that would expand from the current eight to a total of ten the automobile lanes on the I-90 bridge. Our concerns are as follows:

(1) The 1976 memorandum of understanding that supported construction of the I-90 bridge specified that the facility would "accommodate no more than eight motor vehicle lanes," and that continued access of Mercer Island single occupancy vehicle drivers to the center lanes was lowest in priority. Now WSDOT and Sound Transit are proposing to breach the agreement's restriction on lanes but to maintain the unusual access of Mercer Island drivers to the center lanes. The agencies' analyses show that this alternative would cause additional traffic collisions because of the elimination of the shoulders, which were originally sold as being essential for safety. The agencies are ignoring the position of the Federal Highway Administration, which is that the expansion alternative should not even be in the final scope because of its serious safety and environmental problems.

(2) Any increase in the number of I-90 bridge lanes must be examined only as part of an environmental impact statement (EIS). According to WSDOT and Sound Transit's own figures, expanding the I-90 bridge to ten lanes would bring an additional 10-15 per cent more motor vehicle traffic, most of it single occupancy vehicles; yet these agencies are claiming that the result will be "no significant impact." They need to acknowledge that such additions in traffic will bring more air pollution, water pollution, single occupancy vehicle traffic on city streets, and damage to the bicycle/pedestrian path. Sound Transit and WSDOT are preparing only an environmental assessment, which in federal law is the equivalent of a SEPA checklist and does not meet federal EIS requirements for a technical process for scoping and alternatives development. The process they propose will lack the public and intergovernmental checks and balances that apply to a draft and final EIS.

(3) Any exploration of increasing the number of lanes on the I-90 Bridge should be conducted only as a part of the Trans-Lake Washington study and its associated EIS. The Trans-Lake Washington study was named and designed specifically to examine SR 520 and I-90 as a whole. It is inappropriate for the I-90 lane study to be moving ahead separately with limited environmental analysis and inadequate public process (much of it conducted on Mercer Island). Now that the Trans Lake Washington study has been speeded up and the Mercer Island Project has been slowed down, the two should be consolidated. Doing so would avoid needless duplication of analysis and meetings, and would give the I-90 discussion comprehensiveness and public involvement that it now lacks.

(4) The I-90 Bridge was designed to accommodate light rail and other all-transit technologies. Opening up the entire area of the bridge now to more automobile traffic will jeopardize our future ability to convert some of that space to light rail or to a bus-only lane. In other parts of the country, proposed transit lines have faced much more opposition when they would displace existing transit lines than when they would not.

The Seattle Community Council Federation strongly supports improved transit access on the I-90 bridge, but urges that in doing so, Sound Transit not "subsidize the competition" by increasing the bridge's single occupancy vehicle traffic. Doing so will only harm the environment, reduce safety, and overwhelm city streets on either side of the bridge with still more traffic.

Date of Comment: January 10, 2001

Subjects: Transit, bicycle/pedestrian lane, I-90, and EIS.

Comment: To: Trans-lake Executive, Technical and Advisory Committees

We the undersigned groups believe that Sound Transit is attempting to expedite a major change to the I-90 corridor without adequate study or public input. We support the stated goal of the "I-90 Two-Way Transit Operations" project, however, Sound Transit has lost sight of this goal in promoting a costly and unsafe expansion of I-90 that goes beyond the purpose and need of the original voter-approved plan to implement two-way transit in the center lanes of I-90. Sound Transit's plan is also inconsistent with the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) governing bridge operations. We encourage Sound Transit and WSDOT to carry out the existing MOA, which calls for safe and effective two-way transit operations.

The objective of any I-90 reconfiguration should be to encourage transit ridership and move more people, not more cars, without increasing collisions. Any expansion of I-90 should be done under the Trans-Lake Study including a full Environmental Impact Statement process looking at all the alternatives.

Whichever alternative is ultimately adopted, we want a commitment from Sound Transit and WSDOT that they will not reduce safety for motorists or degrade the facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians, and a guarantee of continuous bicycle and pedestrian access during any and all construction.

Date of Comment: January 3, 2001

Subjects: Alternatives, impacts, mitigations/enhancements, transit, bicycle/pedestrian lane, and EIS.

Comment: The configuration ultimately adopted for the SR-520 corridor will have a profound influence on transportation practices throughout the region, and the environmental impacts of the various configurations considered should be analyzed broadly and thoroughly.

The Trans-Lake EIS should evaluate, under each Trans-Lake configuration considered, by each mode of travel included in that configuration, and for the aggregate sum of all modes in that configuration:

I. Noise impact

- A. During construction
- B. From operation of newly constructed lanes
- C. From resulting increase of traffic on city streets
 - 1. Arterials
 - 2. Residential streets

II. Air quality impact

A. Local effects, with emphasis on health impacts, and assessment of the risk that EPA will find the region out of attainment with the federal Clean Air Act

1. Carbon monoxide
2. Ozone
3. Nitrogen oxides
4. Hydrocarbons
5. Particulates

B. Global effect of carbon dioxide, with particular reference to international efforts (Kyoto protocols) to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, describing expected effects of the rising concentration of those gases, including global warming and the resulting

1. Sea level rise
2. Diminished mountain snow pack

C. Pro rata share of pollution elsewhere in the world (from extracting, shipping, and refining petroleum) determined as a function of regional consumption of petroleum products estimated under each configuration.

III. Water quality impact

A. Road and street runoff

1. Oil and grease
2. Heavy metals

B. Pro rata share of pollution elsewhere in the world (from extracting, shipping, and refining petroleum) determined as a function of regional consumption of petroleum products estimated under each configuration.

IV. Street impact - congestion and safety

A. Traffic volume and travel times on city streets

1. Arterials
2. Residential streets

B. Accident rate

1. Pedestrians
2. Bicyclists
3. Vehicles

V. Social and financial impact

A. State government budget, for construction and operation

B. Local government budget, to accommodate possible increase in traffic volume from SR 520

1. Effect of diversion of public funds to this purpose, including which budget sectors are expected to be adversely affected and by how much
2. Tax burden

C. Mobility of that segment of the population dependent on public transportation

Date of Comment: January 31, 2001

Subjects: Alternatives, HCT, and transit.

Summary of Comment: Have you determined the technical feasibility of retrofitting an elevated transit system like monorail to the existing structure? If so where can I get details?
